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ABSTRACT

Advantages and examples of year-round education are discussed in this publication. Advantages include instructional benefits, relief from overcrowding, savings on operational and capital costs, increased teacher flexibility, improved attendance, and reduced vandalism. Guidelines for implementation, calendar design, and descriptions of various year-round plans are presented. (LMI)

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Thoughtful observers of public education increasingly are challenging the traditional school-year calendar in the United States. They ask: Does it make sense to continue a school calendar designed primarily to serve the agricultural economy of the nineteenth century?

Other pointed questions quickly follow: Why do America's schools continue a school calendar that interrupts formal instruction for up to three months at a time? Can the school year be organized so that summer learning loss is reduced?

Critics of the September-June calendar believe it is outmoded instructionally and difficult to defend academically. They point out that the nine month calendar does not correspond to the way people learn, and that students can and do learn in all seasons of the year. Furthermore, an educational program that recognizes this fact offers promise for better learning and minimizes the reality of summer learning loss.

This program has alternative names: some call it "continuous education,"others refer to it as a "modified school calendar," still others call it the "three-vacation plan" or the "four-vacation plan." Whatever it is called, year-round education more nearly fits the way students learn.

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In addition to fostering better learning conditions, year-round education can mean savings and relief from overcrowding in districts with escalating enrollments. By utilizing existing space more efficiently, year-round calendars can create up to 50 percent more capacity. They also save operational and capital costs by making more efficient use of staff, furniture, and supplies required for new buildings.

Instructional benefits

Year-round education reorganizes the school year to provide more continuous instruction and to reduce, but not eliminate, the summer vacation. Districts can implement year-round education in various ways, adapting it to local situations.

The September-June calendar interrupts a student's learning pattern. Consequently, there is a need for considerable review at the beginning of an instructional year, wasting time that students could use to acquire new information.

For instance, an increasing number of students come from homes where formal English is not the primary language. Proficiency in any language requires formal instruction on a continuous basis. A long summer vacation disrupts this formal training, and for most students, the language of summer is the language of the family and community, whether it be English or another language. Three months away from formal instruction hinders language acquisition.

School districts with several years' experience with year-round education report that their students do as well as or better than their September-June counterparts, regardless of the type of year-round calendar used. Not a single school that has implemented the concept has experienced a drop in achievement because of its implementation.

By effective use of students' vacation periods, known as "intersessions," it is possible to provide immediate remediation as well as enrichment activities for students. Schools can use this period for students needing remedial help in reading, math, spelling, and study skills, or to offer specialized programs in the arts, sciences, or local government. Intersessions are important to student learning. The question is not whether there is to be a vacation or not, but rather whether a vacation needs to be three months long.

Students experiencing learning difficulties in a traditional September-June calendar most usually go through nine months of failure and frustration before they are invited to attend summer school — far too late for effective

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remediation to occur. In contrast, intermittent vacations accommodate more frequent remediation in direct response to student needs.

Relief from overcrowding

Multi-track, year-round education solves the problem of too many students enrolled in existing facilities. With this arrangement, students are divided into equal groups, with most students attending school while others are on vacation.

For example, suppose 1,000 students are enrolled in a school with a rated capacity for only 750. The students are organized into four groups of 250 each for a total 1,000. Three of the groups, or 750 students, are in school at one time, while the fourth group is on vacation. When the vacationing group returns, another group of 250 goes on vacation, and so the staggered schedule continues. Thus, there are never more than 750 students in the school at one time. The stated capacity limits are observed, but a greater number of students can be served in a given school.

Besides relieving overcrowded conditions, multi-track scheduling can save both operational and capital costs, by serving students within an economy of scale and by avoiding unnecessary construction costs (see below).

Flexibility for teachers

Teachers who work in year-round schools can extend their contract year, and thus earn additional compensation, by:

- serving as substitutes during their vacation periods
- teaching specialized, enriching intersession classes
- taking on differentiated educational assignments during their vacation periods — such as developing instructional units or materials, or
- serving as interim administrators during the absence of a principal or supervisor.

All of their work occurs within the boundaries of the teaching profession, and many states add the extra compensation they earn to basic salary for later retirement benefits.

Teachers on a year-round schedule also have the option of vacationing in various seasons of the year, often in off-peak times at considerable savings. Many districts also allow teachers to utilize a few "exchange" days in which teachers off-track exchange days with teachers on-track to take care of occasional, unavoidable, personal situations. With more frequent breaks and greater flexibility, teachers can relax, travel, study, and pursue a variety of activities, which may reduce the stress and burnout factors that teachers so often cite.

Other benefits

Savings: While year-round programs can allow teachers to lengthen their contract year and earn larger salaries, they actually translate to school district savings. This is because individual teachers are serving more students and the additional salaries are divided by the additional students served in a multi-track program. Thus, while gross costs may increase (such as additional salary), per pupil (per unit) costs will go down because those additional costs are divided by the additional students served.

Studies on year-round education conducted by Brigham Young University and school districts in California and Florida have concluded that multi-track year-round calendars have the potential for saving a school district money in both operating and capital outlay costs. The Oxnard (California) School District, for example, reports that its multi-track year-round programs save the district approsimately $1,000,000 annually in operating costs, and $5,000,000 in capital outlay costs. Additional cost analyses are underway at the time of this writing.

Better attendance: Most school districts with year-round education report that both teacher and student attendance has improved. The reason seems to be associated with the more frequently scheduled vacations: teachers seem to have less need to use sick-leave days for rest and recuperation and students are eager to return to school after the separation from friends during the vacation.

Reduced vandalism: Several year-round districts have reported reduced vandalism costs. The reasons are clear: first, the building is in more continuous use, with more people on the grounds more days annually; and second, because of the more frequent vacation periods, there seems to be less tension between students and the school, thereby lessening the probability for vandalism.

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Getting started

School districts moving to the study of year-round education can learn from several generalizations formed by past experiences:

- Those leading or supporting the study should themselves become well-versed in the subject. Because year-round education has variety and flexibility, district leaders themselves must become familiar with the options.
- A period of one year to eighteen months is recommended for study leading to implementation. Two years or more of study may only serve to bolster the inertia of tradition.
- Invite all groups important to the success of year-round education to study the concept, including those not ordinarily a direct part of the school enterprise. Districts should make a special effort to invite youth-serving agencies in the community.
- When introducing the concept to a community, leaders must take care not to schedule a large community discussion in the earliest stages of study. Rather, deliver information to many smaller groups frequently. Many educational leaders make the mistake of calling an all-community meeting early in the study of change — in the interest of efficiency. Such meetings encourage grandstanding by the opponents of change. Much intended change has been blocked by traditionalists even before the new concept is understood and often their opposition is first crystallized in a large meeting.
- Unlike other reform/restructuring attempts which occur within the four walls of the schoolhouse and go unnoticed by the larger community, change to a year-round schedule will impact and thus be noticed by many other groups. For example, the delivery of child care may change, the back-to-school sale may be altered, the local church's vacation bible class may be altered, and the "summer camp" experience may occur in May or September. Leaders of the calendar change should be alert to these potential situations and knowledgeable about how to solve, or ameliorate, possible problem areas!

Designing new calendars

Those wishing to rethink the instructional year can come up with their own designs for a new calendar plan. The basic considerations in the design are these:

- Block out weekends, if these are not to be used.
- Be aware of legal/local holidays.
- Consider all 12 months for scheduling purposes.
- Consider state and district minimums for the instructional days per year.
- Provide opportunities for intersessions.
- Provide adequate time for intersessions.
- Include staff development days.
- Review impact of scheduling on facilities.

The various year-round plans

The year-round education concept provides several options for restructuring the school year to provide better education for students. Most of the calendars realign the school year into periods of instruction followed by vacations (called intersessions). Some extend the school year to provide more days or to provide greater availability of instruction. Below are short descriptions of the calendars.

45-15 Single-Track Plan

One of the easiest plans to implement at either the elementary or secondary level is the 45-15 single-track calendar. It is similar to a college's quarter system. This plan divides the year into four nine-week terms, separated by four three-week vacations or intersessions. Students and teachers attend school for nine weeks (45 days), then they take a three-week vacation (15 days). This sequence of sessions and vacations repeats four times each year, thus providing the usual 36 weeks or 180 days of schooling, plus another 12 of scheduled vacations. Note that four additional weeks each year are allocated to winter holidays, spring vacation, and national, state, or local holidays.

In implementing the 45-15 single-track Plan, it is not always possible to be consistent numerically because of the way legal and local holidays fall. Most terms will follow the 45-15 day sequence, but other terms might have a 47-13 day arrangement or a ten week/four week sequence around the Thanksgiving and winter holiday (Christmas) periods.

The 15-day period in which students do not attend school is called intersession. This period may be used for vacation, or teachers and students may choose to spend the intersession in special one-, two-, or three-week programs. Intersessions may be used for traditional curricular offerings, either remedial or enrichment, or for elective on-campus or off-campus learning opportunities. The programming potential of intersessions is one of the instructional advantages of any year-round plan.

45-15 Multi-Track Plan

Some school districts have used the year-round concept in situations where there is an over-enrollment of students for the available space. Using the same model as the 45-15 single-track concept presented above, administrators can modify it to combine several groups (tracks) of students in such a way that available space increases by 20% to 50% without building new facilities.

In the 45-15 multiple-track plan, students normally are divided into two to four groups, depending on enrollment. For example, in a four-track version of the plan, while groups A, B, and C, are in school, group D is on vacation. When D returns, A goes on vacation. The rotation continues every three weeks, thus providing for 33% additional space in the school. Each track has its own 45-15 schedule of nine weeks in school and three weeks on vacation.

served. Teachers usually follow the track schedule of their students; however, they can be reassigned to another track, thereby lengthening their contract year and earning a larger salary.

60-20 Plan

This plan is a variation of the 45-15 schedule, with students attending school for 60 days and then vacationing for 20 days, similar to a trimester concept. Students rotate through the year until they have had three 60-day terms and three 20-day vacations. The 60-20 Plan can be varied to take account of holidays and state attendance regulations. It can be conducted in either a single-track or a multiple-track format. This plan has become a good compromise for those who want longer teaching and vacation periods and are not wedded to the traditional semester or quarter calendars.

60-15 Plan

This plan borrows from both the 45-15 and 60-20 plans in that the instructional period is 60 days and the vacation period is 15 days. By rearranging the instructional days, a common summer vacation of three to four weeks can be given to all students and faculty. It is usually implemented with five tracks available to students, though it is also possible to operate on a single-track mode.

90-30 Plan

This schedule includes two 90-day semesters separated by 30-day vacation periods. Schools are closed during the traditional winter holiday pe-

riod and spring vacation. As in the 45-15 and 60-20 plans, this calendar can be conducted as either a single-track plan or a multi-track plan.

Trimester Plan

The trimester plan uses three instructional periods of 60 days each rather than two semesters of 90 days each. This plan is similar to the 60-20 Plan, but the vacation (intersession) periods are more flexible and may vary from two to six weeks, depending on the calendar adopted by the community.

Quarter Plan

One of the best-known plans, and perhaps the easiest to understand, is the quarter system. It was the first year-round calendar implemented in the early 1900s after the nationwide adoption of the common nine-month school year. Some colleges use this plan. The Quarter Plan usually divides the calendar into four 12-week periods in fall, winter, spring, and summer. Students may select, or be assigned to, any combination of three of the four quarters. They may attend the fourth quarter on a voluntary basis, either on or off campus.

The curriculum is organized so that each quarter is a separate entity. A course begins and ends with each 12-week period. For example, social studies and English programs may offer a series of separate but related courses. Subject areas requiring sequential treatment such as mathematics will be offered in each of the four quarters to complete a year of work. Often this plan leads to an extended year program in that students have 210-240 days of instruction available to them each year.

Quinmester Plan

The quinmester plan divides the school year into five parts, with students required to attend four of the five parts. This calendar is most often used at the secondary level for grades nine through 12. The school year may range up to 220 days, with vacation periods averaging about seven weeks. The quinmester plan often operates on a single-track pattern.

Concept 6 Plan

Concept 6 has been used successfully at both the elementary and secondary levels. It is particularly useful when there is lack of space. It requires that students be divided into three groups, with one group always on vacation, thus releasing up to 50% of available space for instructional use. A high school built for 1,600 students can house 2,400 under a Concept 6 three-track plan. It also can be administered in a single-track pattern. The Concept 6 Plan calls for six terms of approximately 43 days each. Students attend four of the six terms but must attend two of their four terms consecutively. For example, Group A begins in July for its first 43-day term; it is then joined by Group B for another 43 days. Group C enters, but Group A, having completed its 86 days, goes on vacation for 43 days.

The plan provides for 160 or more days each year. In states where 175 or more days of attendance are required, additional days can be completed by overlapping the groups on half-day sessions the first and last day of each term, by independent study and intersession programs, or by creative off-campus group activities. In states that mandate the number of minutes per year in various subjects as a substitute for the number of days, Concept 6 can operate effectively by extending the minutes of instruction each day so that the total accumulation of minutes equals the minimum number of days required by the state.

Five-Track, Five-Term Plan

The five-track, five-term plan divides the school year into five terms of 45 days each. There are five terms in each track. Students attend four of the five for a total of 180 days of instruction annually. This plan is used only on a multi-track basis. It provides for a common summer break of approximately three weeks for all students in addition to 45-day vacation for each track.

Flexible All-Year Plan

The flexible all-year plan is gaining in popularity with various kinds of alternative schools. Basically, this plan calls for school to be open for instruction approximately 240 days per year, although, theoretically, a school year could be longer in states where Saturday and Sunday are now legal school days. Students are required to attend the minimum number of days designated by each state.

To operate this plan, teachers must be willing to individualize learning. Students have three choices: 1) they may attend all days the school is open for additional learning opportunities, even though only 180 may be required; 2) they may attend only the required 175-180 days and spread these days over the 240 that instruction is available; or 3) if a family needs or insists on the traditional nine-month calendar, the student can start by a set date in September and finish in June, completing 180 days after the student's program has begun. ■